

HOUSE No. 1071

By Ms. Wolf of Cambridge, petition of Alice K. Wolf and others for legislation to enhance opportunity for achievement and results for certain students in kindergarten through the third grade. Education.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PETITION OF:

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In the Year Two Thousand and Five.

AN ACT TO ENHANCE STUDENT OPPORTUNITY FOR ACHIEVEMENT AND RESULTS (SOAR).

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

- 1 Chapter 71 of the Acts of 1998 is hereby amended by adding
- 2 section 90, as follows:

3 Chapter 71 Section 90. Student Opportunity for Achievement
4 and Results (SOAR).

5 (a) It is the intent of the General Court that students in the
6 early school years, especially in schools with a considerable
7 number of low-income children, be in classes small enough to
8 enhance their opportunity for achievement in the early grades.

9 (b) To that end, the General Court hereby establishes a pro-
10 gram, Student Opportunity for Achievement and Results (SOAR).
11 Through this incentive program, the department shall assist eli-
12 gible school systems to establish low class sizes in kindergarten
13 through grades three in schools that are eligible; to engage in pro-
14 fessional development and other activities to enhance learning in
15 the classroom, to work toward other enhancements of the chil-
16 dren's school life that will support increased achievement; and to
17 follow and evaluate student achievement through appropriate
18 methods and research techniques.

19 Initially SOAR will be a five-year program, subject to appropri-
20 ation.

21 (c) The department shall develop procedures to give eligible
22 school departments in the Commonwealth the opportunity to
23 apply for participation in SOAR. It shall develop contracts with
24 schools within school districts that are eligible, as defined below,
25 to carry out the program.

26 These contracts shall commit the school to enhance the oppor-
27 tunity for student achievement and specifically to:

28 (1) Establish a class size of 15 pupils per regular classroom
29 teacher in grades kindergarten to three over a four year period in
30 schools in the district that apply. The number of schools initially
31 eligible in the district is dependent on the total number of pupils
32 in the district as defined below.

33 (2) Engage in teacher and staff development that enables
34 teachers to maximize the benefits of smaller class size by
35 enhancing the curriculum, improving the quality of teaching,
36 increasing parent and family participation in their children's
37 learning, and promoting other aspects of classroom life that sup-
38 port the learning environment for children.

39 (3) Enhance the school day by participating in the universal
40 free breakfast program and making all efforts to apply for grants
41 and develop after-school programs for the participating school,

42 including collaboration with community groups and programs.
43 The department shall collaborate with the district and the partici-
44 pating school to support such opportunities.

45 (d) Eligible school districts and schools. School districts in
46 which the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced
47 lunch (the measure of low-income under 20 USC 2723) is 20% or
48 more are eligible to apply for participation in SOAR. Each such
49 district may apply for participation by 1 or more schools,
50 depending on the number of pupils in the district. Initially, each
51 district with up to 5,000 pupils may apply for one school; those
52 with 5,000-10,000 pupils may apply for two schools, and so forth.
53 Schools declared under-performing, as defined by M.G.L. c. 69, s.
54 1J, shall be given a priority to participate in SOAR.

55 Schools within the district, assuming there is more than one,
56 will be eligible to participate in SOAR in the order in which they
57 serve low-income pupils, as defined above assuming that space is
58 available and the school is willing to contract to participate in
59 SOAR. Thus, a school with the highest percent of low-income
60 pupils will be eligible first and so forth. The school department
61 shall give a priority to a school declared under-performing by the
62 department. The school department will put all due diligence to
63 assisting schools to be able to participate.

64 All schools that participate in SOAR must have all day kinder-
65 garten. The department will assure that the schools have access to
66 department programs that assist in developing or maintaining all-
67 day kindergarten.

68 (e) Class size. Class size is the number of pupils assigned to a
69 regular classroom teacher at the beginning of the school year and
70 maintained throughout the year. Within SOAR, classrooms shall
71 maintain a class size of 15 pupils to 1 teacher. However, eligible
72 schools may propose classes of 30 pupils to 2 classroom teachers
73 where space would be otherwise unavailable and the best judg-
74 ment of the school and school district is that the classrooms estab-
75 lished thus would be appropriate learning environments. The
76 department will work with the districts to assure that the environ-
77 ments are appropriate.

78 (f) Phase in of SOAR implementation. Schools will contract to
79 participate in SOAR over the life of the program. The schools will
80 move to lower class size, as follows:

81 In the school year, 2005/2006, kindergartens will lower class
82 size; in 2006/2007, kindergartens — grade1; 2007/2008, kinder-
83 gartens-grade 2; 2008/2009, kindergartens — grade 3.

84 (g) Professional development. For some schools and teachers,
85 such low class sizes will be a very new experience. Since the goal
86 of this program is to maximize children's opportunity for learning,
87 schools and teachers will be assisted to develop curricula,
88 teaching techniques, classroom management practices, the use of
89 technology, integration of parents and community resources into
90 the classroom, and other new or innovative ways of enhancing
91 student learning. For teachers just entering teaching, a mentoring
92 program will be included in the professional development plan.
93 The program for this professional development will be enumer-
94 ated in the contract.

95 (h) Before and after school programs. Each school participating
96 in SOAR will participate in the universal breakfast program. In
97 addition, schools will commit to working toward after school
98 opportunities that will enhance the learning capacity of children
99 and will assist in making each child "school ready" for each
100 school day. These programs may be within the school building or
101 coordinated with other community agencies and should include
102 opportunities for recreation, physical activities, and artistic
103 endeavors.

104 (i) Evaluation and research. The department shall establish a
105 program to monitor and evaluate the impact of project SOAR on
106 students' early learning. The district and the school shall develop
107 a plan to evaluate student progress and other aspects of the pro-
108 gram. There shall be multiple assessments of school achievement.
109 The district and the school shall commit to working with the
110 department on such evaluations as are established.

111 The board shall establish such evaluation with an appropriate
112 school of education. It shall conduct research to measure and
113 compare student performance in schools that participate in the
114 SOAR program with other schools of comparable demographics
115 so as to give the General Court the ability to understand the condi-
116 tions under which this project enhances learning for students. This
117 evaluation shall also monitor the school systems' implementation
118 of SOAR.

119 The evaluation, where appropriate, shall assess the factors that
120 make the program effective in improving student learning and
121 those that do not. For example, if there are schools that use the 30-
122 2 class size model, the impact on learning shall be examined
123 against the 15-1 classes. Where appropriate, the impact of after-
124 school programs shall be measured. Other variables that impact
125 the ability of children to learn may also be part of the study.

126 Schools participating in SOAR must participate in this evalua-
127 tion but the Department must assure that evaluation techniques do
128 not interfere with the learning environment for the classrooms and
129 schools.

130 (j) Integration with other programs. The department shall make
131 every effort to support integration of existing education programs
132 that it funds and supervises within schools that participate in
133 SOAR and collaboration between programs. Since SOAR is
134 attempting to create an environment for maximal learning oppor-
135 tunity, early literacy programs, professional development pro-
136 grams, teacher mentor programs, and others can be an integral
137 part of SOAR.

138 (k) Funding. SOAR shall be funded through state grants appro-
139 priated for the purpose of improving student achievement through
140 lower class size in the early grades, subject to yearly appropria-
141 tion.

142 After a school district has been approved for participation in
143 SOAR, and thereafter, the department shall calculate grants for the
144 ensuing school year. The state funding may be used only for the
145 purposes described herein and not to replace existing local
146 funding.

147 (1) The department shall base its calculation for funding of the
148 lowering of class size on the average teacher salary across the
149 Commonwealth multiplied by $\frac{2}{3}$ for each teacher's class reduced
150 to 15. If the actual number of classes affected prove different
151 from the estimates, corrections will be made to the school sys-
152 tem's funding as soon as is practicable during the school year.

153 (2) The department shall develop a formula for assisting school
154 systems to carryout the needed staff development. The formula
155 shall include consideration of the need for workshop training time,
156 teacher planning time, and professional assistance that might be
157 required. This requirement may be met by utilizing funds in extant

158 state programs but may not take away from professional develop-
159 ment funds for staff of higher grades or other schools.

160 (3) The department shall provide auxiliary funds, if necessary,
161 to institute the universal free breakfast program to the extent that
162 federal funds do not cover the cost, estimated to be at the point
163 where 60% or fewer of the children are eligible for free and
164 reduced lunch. Schools in the SOAR program will make every
165 effort to encourage families eligible for the fee and reduced lunch
166 program to register for the program.

167 (4) The department shall collaborate with school district in the
168 program to give them maximum technical assistance and access to
169 funding available for after-school programming.

170 (5) The department shall utilize appropriated lower class size
171 funding to establish and operate the monitoring and research pro-
172 gram to the extent necessary to assure that such monitoring is
173 effective in providing information critical to the evacuation of this
174 program by the General Court.

175 (I) There shall be an ongoing effort to evaluate the implementa-
176 tion and impact of SOAR on its goals and to evaluate the effec-
177 tiveness of the programs within the schools.

178 The department shall provide a yearly report on the ongoing
179 monitoring and research to the Joint Committee on Education, the
180 Arts, and Humanities, to the Speaker of the House, to the Presi-
181 dent of the Senate, and to the Governor of the Commonwealth.

182 To the extent that any schools are not meeting the goals that
183 they have established, the department will assist the schools to
184 meet their goals.

185 The department may terminate a contract if a school department
186 has violated its contractual obligations: such termination must be
187 based on documented evidence of such violation(s).